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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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They were doomed from the start! The GameDay 2004 Super Bowl victor was the Panthers - every Game Day victor in the past has been the real victor. The Patriots were favored - never before in history. The game was not at home. There was no snow on the ground, or frosty conditions in the air. The Patriots win! Unbelievable game! I was pulling out my hair during the last quarter, cursing the Patriots' secondary! Call it what you like - fate, luck, whatever - it was a great win for the Pats! And what turns out to be the most sought-after item in history on the internet? The clip from the halftime show of Janet Jackson's boob. Paris Hilton, eat your heart out! <sigh> How can I possibly top the Super Bowl with an editorial about a major virus, or spam, or some other hot topic? I can't, so I won't.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. This is another one of those weeks when I have absolutely no idea of what I'm going to end up saying in this part of the column.

Sometimes I start with a clear idea of what I want to say. Sometimes I find a 'hook' while I'm wandering around the keyboard. And sometimes... like now... nothing seems to come together.

So I guess I'll fall back on one of my favorite subjects: The exploration of space.

You'll hear all kinds of arguments both for and against spending money on space exploration these days. Sure, it's true that we spend a lot of money each year on the space program. It's also true that we spend less on space exploration than many other things. Don't quote me on this because I'm not positive of the numbers, but I seem to remember that

total annual expenditures for the space program amount to less than one percent of the national budget.

With the almost daily news about our ice caps shrinking, ice sheets thinning, temperatures rising, and jet streams slowing, it only makes sense to me that we should 'hedge our bet'. Perhaps we're seeing some sort of natural rhythm or maybe even actual global warming that's unrelated to anything that we are doing. The fact remains that things are changing. Whether or not we're the cause won't really seem all that important when/if we all have to start using a 2000 sunblock and personal portable air conditioners.

Technological advances can sometimes result from a 'eureka moment', but more often they are the result of slow, careful experimentation. And that's almost never a low-cost proposition.

One thing I don't like is when people throw around 'facts and figures' about NASA inventing products or technologies. You've probably seen commercials for everything from 'space age polymers'to 'fruit and grain energy bars' to the next big thing in bed construction.

The truth of the matter is that NASA doesn't invent anything. They DO commission studies, experiments, designs and even entire projects, but they don't actually invent the stuff.

Back in the days of the Apollo Program, the big things were Tang and Space Food Sticks. Today, we've come to take a lot of the advances of the space program for granted. We look at pictures that come to us from more than a hundred million miles away and simply shrug. Instead of looking upon the sands of another world and appreciating the technological advances involved, we bemoan the malfunctioning of a thermocouple in the very same machine.

Perhaps some of the technology created for the exploration of Mars will one day help us to live peacefully here on earth... or help us escape our mistakes if we find that we can't.

Let's get to the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Raoul Teulings asks about formatting a particular kind of removable media drive:

"Is it possible to format disks from a Jaz drive who
are pre-formatted for Macintosh? Or is that
impossible?"

Edward Baiz tells Raoul:

"Yes Raoul that is possible. A friend of mine gave a 1GB Jaz cart
that was pre-formatted for a Mac. I just used HDDriver and re-formatted
it for the Atari and it works fine now."

Kenneth Medin adds this bit of useful wisdom:

"I suppose a Jaz is just like any other SCSI or IDE HD... Never format a HD! They were formatted when new and the formatting scheme is platform independent. Only if the drive has bad sectors it might be of any use to actually try o reformat it.

What you want is to partition it with Atari compatible partitions! This will wipe out the Mac partition data and make the drive like new."

Steve Sweet asks Kenneth:

"Why not format a HD, I've never had problems with doing that, it's generally unnecessary but saves possible problems if you take the drive from one platform to another.

Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, adds:

"This is possible, but partitioning is enough. There is no need in formatting drives that do not have bad sectors, it's just a waste of time."

Mark Bedingfield asks about his new TT030:

"Hi All, just picked up the new TT. It is very under spec. No TT ram and only 2Mb ST ram. Also only a very small hard disk. So on to my dumb questions (being that I am used to Falcons).

1 - What is the biggest drive that can be fitted internally? It was fitted with a 200Mb Conner. I have had zip luck with a Quantum 2.1 ST. Only ICD utils will even detect it. AHDI 6.06, and Hddriver 7.6 will not recognize it all. The drive is set to ID0 and term is on. The only other drives I have are bigger than this. Oh, and what can TOS 3.06 handle natively?

2 - How about ram expansion? 2Mb is less than my ST's. I had to resort to NVDI 2.5, because after installing NVDI 5 I only had 200k free. What are the limits to the TT's ram expansion?

3- Also VME cards? What are available?

Got to say tho, it is a bloody quick Machine.

I have been unable to get any of my 2.1 gig drives working. Internally or externally. These are 2x Quantum Fireballs (TM and SE I think) and 1x IBM UW drive. I have set all to ID 0 and tried with or without termination.

I did get a zip drive and a 4x CDRom working happily. But apart from the old 200 meg drive no luck.

I did note that the termination resistor pack had been removed from the Main board. Any idea's? I will try a 500meg drive tonight to see if there is any difference.

Also, does anybody have an e-mail address for this gentleman selling TTram boards?""

Peter West tells Mark:

"I seem to remember that some Quantums, at least, needed parity (or was it

initiator ID?) signals. Most hosts and drivers do not provide these.

Which driver are you using? If it’s not HDDRIVER, download the demo version and try that. Although commercial, it’s by far the best driver available for the Atari, and is still supported."

Dennis Vermeire adds:

"Yes, every "Fireball" model fits in that category, but the hard disk however is recognized under HD Driver and can be partitioned, booting from it however is not possible, so anyone who obtains such a drive can only use it as secondary hard disk. If being able to boot from it is not a priority, then don’t dismiss the "Fireball" models, they are build to last, very very silent, and not power hungry at all.

If HD Driver can’t recognize the drive, then it’s probably defective. Like I said, HD Driver has no problems with the Fireballs models from Quantum (I have two here somewhere)."

’Sam F’ asks about max RAM for a Falcon:

"So how much ram can a Falcon handle. Mine has got the Wizztronics memory board and a stick of 16meg ram. Could I go higher on this board, say 32 megs?"

Maurits van de Kamp tells Sam:

"Without special hardware, the Falcon can handle 14MB (often 16MB of simms are used for this). But there are expansions that allow for more, for example the Centurbo2 which can handle 128MB (or was it even more?). The CT60 probably handles even more but I don’t know that one very well.

To be more precise, the Falcon can handle 14MB of ST-ram and a huge amount of TT-ram. But to be able to use TT-ram, you need special cards like the Centurbo. Further limitations depend on these cards."

Greg Goodwin adds:

"The CT60 can go up to 512MB."

Cyril Lambin asks about using a VGA monitor on an ST:

"I’d like to connect my old STe to a standard SVGA monitor. Of course I searched the net and found a lot of schematics, but I don’t know which one to use. There’s one with simple connections between the ST and VGA pins, one with 5 resistors (on R/G/B connections, I guess it’s to compensate the difference of luminosity between the three color component) and one a little bit trickier including a transistor. Which one should work best ?

Now I also have a SM124 monitor that is non-working but might be easily repaired (the image is garbled but the CRT looks okay). I don’t know how to fix it so if someone living in Paris wants it, contact me. "

Edward Baiz tells Cyril:

"I can hook my STe to my Compaq 17 inch SVGA monitor indirectly using an old piece of Atari hardware called "Video Key" and a video converter. It is a little blurry, but readable never the less. Cannot get monochrome. but color modes work fine."

JØrôme Ginestet adds:

"When connecting a ST on a standard SVGA, only the monochrome mode is possible, so RGB signals aren't used (there is a different pin for monochrome signal). If you found schematics indicating resistors on RGB pins, they are not describing a ST-VGA cable.
The one with direct connection is probably the good one.
This one works fine :
http://ginesj.free.fr/stvga/ "

Djordje Vukovic adds his thoughts:

"The monochrome signal from a ST should be supplied in appropriate proportions to R/G/B inputs of the monitor. That is what the resistors are for; if you do not use them, you will get a very bluish-looking monochrome picture on a colour (S)VGA monitor.

Btw. possibly the best picture could be obtained by using a -monochrome- (S)VGA monitor. In this way one would not see on the screen the moire effects resulting from the interference of the monochrome patterns and the CRT shadowmask/pixels."

JØrôme Ginestet tells Djordje:

"Not at all. And I have proof in front of me.

In fact it's the other way round : if you want to use a monochrome display with a RGB source, you will need the different resistors, because luminance is a*R+b*G+c*B, not R+G+B.
But with a RGB display, white (or pure gray) is obtained by sending exactly the same voltage level on R, G and B.
This can be easily seen by looking at RGB signals on the outputs of a ST or Falcon displaying a white or gray screen with an oscilloscope.

The only worry with direct connection seems to be (I have not checked that) that the voltage level on the monochrome output is slightly higher than the standard max of the RGB input. However, that doesn't seem to cause any trouble."

Janez Valant takes a slightly different approach:'

"Another possibility is to get TV tuner (external) preferably. U need to take care that tuner have RGB inputs and not only composite, if u don't have STE or STxM. Machines without modulators, also don't have composite wired to connector, so has to be RGB in that case, which is better anyway... Serves me nice, and i also can connect many 8bit machines, although i did frag composite from them..."

Carey Christenson asks about NVDI, CAB and his printer:

"I have been experimenting with different drivers in NVDI for printing under CAB. I have a EPSON Stylus color 880 PRINTER. Is anyone out there using this printer and if so what driver are you using and the settings inside of NVDI. I finally found an Epson Stylus Color 1500 is working quite well and printing under CAB in COLOR is reasonably fast at 720 dpi with the CT60. Just wondering if anyone else is using a different driver that might work just as well and possibly faster yet. Or does the driver not make that much difference anyway???"

Kenneth Medin tells Carey:

"You are actually lucky. I have a HP 960c and can only print at 300 dpi in colour. B&W goes to 600 dpi with NVDI.

Magic and NVDI 5 make it possible to print in background. If you add IPRN2D.PRG to the AUTO folder it will get as fast as it can. My TT does print just as fast as my pc as soon as it has rendered the print data to the temp file."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Final Fantasy Comes to GameCube!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Next Xbox in 2005?
Marvel, EA Team Up!
And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Next Xbox Could Come in Fall 2005

The next version of Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox video game console could be released in the fall of 2005, without the hard drive that was one of the defining characteristics of the current game console, the San Jose Mercury

News reported on Monday.

The paper, citing information it said had been shared with game developers and publishers, said the console would use three International Business Machines Corp. processors based on the new generation of powerful 64-bit computing technology and a graphics chip from ATI Technologies Inc.

The newspaper also reported that the new console would likely be shipped without a hard drive and said it was not "guaranteed" that the new console would be able to play current Xbox games.

By eliminating the hard drive, Microsoft could reduce the cost of production while allowing game data to be stored on flash memory, the newspaper said.

A Microsoft spokeswoman was not immediately available to comment on the report.

Both Microsoft and Sony Corp. are expected to divulge more details on the next generation of their hardware in the coming months at industry conferences in March and May. Most in the industry had expected those next-generation systems to come out only in 2005 or 2006.

Microsoft executives have said they do not want to give Sony the head start in the current generation that it had in the last one. Sony’s PlayStation 2 came out a year before the Xbox and has built a commanding worldwide lead.

Part of the strength of the PS2, industry leaders have said, is that it is backward-compatible with the original PlayStation. As the Xbox is Microsoft’s first foray into games hardware, it has never been clear if the company intended future generations of the console to play old games.

Video game hardware and software sales totaled $10 billion in the United States in 2003, though growth is expected to slow in coming years ahead of the launch of the new consoles.

Final Fantasy Comes to GameCube

Final Fantasy is coming to GameCube, with Nintendo adding its own spin to the popular series from Square Enix.

Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles, expected to be in stores Feb. 11, can be played as a solo game but its major appeal will be as a multi-player title. The game allows up to four players to campaign together on one console, controlling characters on the same screen. The multiplayer version of the game uses Nintendo’s connectivity to full advantage. But you need some other hardware to get going: a Game Boy player (around $70), which connects Nintendo’s hand-held Game Boy portable to the GameCube, and each player needs a Game Boy Advance or the newer Game Boy Advance XP (around $140).

The hand-held Game Boy Advance serves as a controller for each player, allowing them to switch weapons and make other decisions without cluttering up the main TV screen hooked to the GameCube console.

The main screen does have small icon displays for each player, reminding them whether they are in attack or defence mode, how much life they have

left and so forth.

Playing the game solo can be done with just the GameCube and its normal controller.

The game itself is all about co-operation. A poisonous cloud has blanketed the world and the only thing protecting the band of adventurers is a magic crystal that creates a force field.

One of the players is entrusted with carrying the crystal, while the others protect him.

An early look at Crystal Chronicles suggests a multiplayer campaign could be a lot of fun, if you already have the necessary hardware - and friends ready to hit the video game road with you.

The game looks very polished, with a Zelda-like feel - more of a simple action-adventure rather than complicated role-playing game.

Using the Game Boy Advance as a controller, with its separate screen, also raises some interesting possibilities for future Nintendo games.

Crystal Chronicles is available only on GameCube and Nintendo has high hopes for it.

Future Fantasy titles have sold well in the past with Square Enix saying worldwide sales of the series have topped 48 million units.

The most recent title, Final Fantasy X-2, has sold more than one million units in North America since shipping in November, on top of two million in Japan.

Nintendo is also using its connectivity as a hook for its new Pokemon game, Pokemon Colosseum. The role-playing game, which has impressive graphics even to a non-Pokemon man, allows players to import characters they have built up in previous Pokemon titles on Game Boy Advance into Colosseum, where they can be used in the game’s Battle Mode.

Pokemon Colosseum is due out March 24.

Nintendo is throwing in a bonus to gamers who pre-order the title through EB Games. They will get a bonus disc with the Pokemon character Jirachi the Wishmaker. This character can then be transferred to other Pokemon games.

There is a Canadian connection to Nintendo’s upcoming releases with Silicon Knights of St. Catharines developing Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes, a special version of the Metal Gear series for the GameCube due out March 4. The stealth game draws on Metal Gear Solid and its sequel Metal Gear 2: Sons of Liberty. Silicon Knights previously did Eternal Darkness: Sanity’s Requiem for the GameCube. ... Metroid: Zero Mission for the Game Boy Advance is a retro version of the Metroid series, and brings back a lot of the game’s original features. It’s due out Feb. 11. ... Details are sketchy on Nintendo’s DS new portable game system. The company says it will have two three-inch screens, allowing gamers to see two different views or use one screen to access a menu. The system is supposed to launch worldwide by the end of 2004 but there is no word yet on what kind of game cartridges DS will use.

Marvel, EA Tie Up Seen Tricky But with Big Potential

Spider-Man, the X-Men and Marvel Enterprises's other superheroes will soon be faced with deadly new enemies being dreamed up by video game publisher Electronic Arts Inc.

Analysts and industry executives said the battle royale must be carefully staged to avoid legal entanglements with other video game publishers who have licensed Marvel characters. But they also said the tie-up could lead to a potential new hit franchise for EA and a new characters that Marvel could leverage into lucrative TV and film deals.

Marvel and EA said on Thursday they had signed a deal for EA to license more than 100 of Marvel's characters, among them "Spider-Man" and the "X-Men," to create a series of fighting games pitting the Marvel heroes against new villains to be created by EA.

Marvel will in turn license the rights to those new characters and feature them in comic books. The first game under the new deal, under development at EA Canada, is expected to be released at the end of 2005.

Marvel already has extensive licensing arrangements for some of the same characters with Activision Inc., THQ Inc. and the games unit of Vivendi Universal, raising questions about how it can license the same property again without risking legal problems or confusing consumers.

"They do step on their toes," said American Technology Research analyst P.J. McNealy.

A Marvel executive said the new EA games would stand out by featuring a battling cast of superheroes, but said the details still needed to be worked out.

"It's very early on. We've just begun developing the game." said Tim Rothwell, president of worldwide consumer products for Marvel.

Eventually, though, Rothwell said, Marvel will be able to exploit the characters EA creates much as it has its own.

"As the new characters emerge and we figure out where the strengths lie in this new cast of characters ... we can begin some publishing initiatives, merchandising and licensing initiatives," he said.

THQ officials had no immediate comment on the new deal. Activision Chief Executive Bobby Kotick said his company had passed on licensing Marvel characters for fighting games.

Japan's Capcom Co. Ltd. previously had such a deal for its "Marvel vs. Capcom" series. The last game in that series was released in March 2003 on the Xbox to disappointing reviews.

"Fighting for the Marvel characters has just historically not been a very successful genre," Kotick said. "EA stepped into that deal, and there are tremendous restrictions in terms of genre, marketing, what they can include on the packaging, the way they can design the games."

Thomas Weisel Partners analyst Gordon Hodge raised his 2004 earnings estimates for Marvel slightly but said the biggest benefits were still a way off.

"We believe Marvel may recognize modest minimum royalty income in the range of $2 million to $3 million in 2004 but could enjoy meaningful royalty overages in 2005 and beyond depending on the success of EA's games, the first of which is likely to be released next year," he said in a note.

Bear Stearns analyst Glen Reid said in a note that any gain from the deal would not likely come until 2006. "We believe the bulk of Marvel's take will be from licensing of original content to come from future EA game development," he said.

While Electronic Arts has little background in fighting games, aside from another licensed property, the successful rap music-themed "Def Jam Vendetta," American Technology's McNealy said the Marvel deal fit a pattern.

"This is typical of Electronic Arts' strategy of signing only multiyear, multifranchise deals for licensed properties such as comic book characters," he said. "You're shooting to be more successful than creative."

Florida Lawmakers Take Aim at Violent Video Games

Bolstered by outrage from Haitian Americans and parents over a top-selling game, a group of Florida lawmakers is moving to stiffen penalties for retailers that sell or rent violent or sexually explicit computer games to minors.

Legislative critics in Florida of violent computer games have been thwarted before in attempts to make selling them to minors a third-degree felony, punishable by up to five years in prison or a $5,000 fine.

But they believe they may now have a better chance of gaining support after ire over Rockstar Game's "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City," in which players are urged to "kill the Haitians" and score points for rape and murder.

"We want to make sure that parents are educated and that retailers are aware that this game and others like it are not appropriate for children," said Florida state House sponsor, Rep. Sheri McInvale, a Democrat from Orlando.

Rockstar and its owners Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. have agreed to remove the "kill the Haitians" phrase from future copies of "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City," but the concession has failed to assuage many critics.

The Florida House bill, and a similar Senate proposal, would require merchants to demand identification for any purchase or rental. Both proposals exempt Internet sales.

But retail associations are urging lawmakers to shelve their plans because, they say, the proposals ignore the Entertainment Software Rating Board system that already ranks video games based on content.

Furthermore, the Interactive Entertainment Merchants Association, an industry group including such retailers as Wal-Mart and video chain Blockbuster Inc, agreed to have procedures in place by next Christmas to stop the sale of mature and adult video games to minors.

"This is a case where the industry is way out in front of government," said Bill Herrle, vice president for governmental affairs for the Florida Retail Federation.

The Florida lawmakers' action is the latest in a series of legal efforts to reign in violent, sexually explicit or profanity-riddled games, including an ordinance given preliminary approval last month by North Miami City Council.

"We're not banning them and requiring retailers to go to expensive extremes. We're just saying we need to deal with video games in the same way we deal with pornography, alcohol and R-rated movies," said McInvale.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

'Mydoom' Virus Brings Down SCO Web Site

A computer virus that targeted a small Utah software company performed as its perpetrators promised on Sunday, bringing down The SCO Group's Web site two days before a similar virus was programmed to attack Microsoft Corp.

The "Mydoom" or "Novarg" virus launched the attack early Sunday with hundreds of thousands of requests, which crippled the site, SCO spokesman Blake Stowell said.

The virus was spread last week by e-mail and caused infected computers to launch the electronic attack against SCO, which has been targeted at least twice this year with such attacks because of its threats to sue users of the Linux operating system in an intellectual property dispute.

On Tuesday, Lindon, Utah-based SCO announced a $250,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of Mydoom's creator. Stowell said the company believes someone within the Linux community is behind the worm.

Sunday's attack had a higher profile because the well-publicized Mydoom virus was involved, but that doesn't make the assault unique, a computer expert said.

"To SCO, it means quite a bit," said Marty Lindner, an analyst at US-CERT, a public-private partnership focused on Internet security. "But in the big scheme of things, this happens all the time."

Internet traffic to SCO's Web site began building late Saturday night, and overwhelmed it just after 12 a.m. EST.

"It's on the scale of hundreds of thousands of computers, all trying to

access www.sco.com all at the same time, several times a minute," Stowell said. "Our capacity to be able to handle that amount of bandwidth, or the number of requests coming in, was completely saturated."

The attack is programmed to continue on SCO's Web site until Feb. 12, according to messages left inside the virus' code.

But Stowell said the company would announce a contingency plan Monday for customers to access the site. He declined to discuss those plans, citing hackers.

It will likely involve slightly altering the wording SCO's Web address, said David Perry, a spokesman for antivirus firm Trend Micro.

SCO does not expect the Web site interruption to affect its business.

"The way we really look at this, people don't come to our Web site to conduct commerce," Stowell said. "They come to obtain information and maybe receive a product update or software patch."

The strain that shut down SCO's Web site was the Mydoom.A virus. Another strain, called Mydoom.B, is set to launch an attack Tuesday on Microsoft.

The companies have been sharing information about the virus and how each is addressing it. Microsoft also has offered a $250,000 reward to help catch those behind the virus.

Lindner said it's difficult to predict the same type of shutdown for Microsoft.

"Depending on the number of machines launching the attack, the outcomes could be the same or completely different," he said. "There are too many unknowns."

Microsoft Web Sites Resist Virus Attack

Microsoft Corp. said it had fought off an attempted software virus attack Tuesday that was aimed at shutting down some of the company's Web sites.

Stephen Toulouse, a security program manager for Microsoft, said the company's Web sites were up and running as of midmorning.

The virus works by getting infected computers to send hundreds of thousands of requests for the site per minute, in hopes of crippling it. Toulouse would not detail how the company had been able to ward off the attack, citing security concerns.

"It's still a little early and we remain vigilant," he said.

The virus, called "Mydoom.B," was programmed to launch an attack on Microsoft's site Tuesday, two days after a variant shut down the Web site of The SCO Group, a small Utah software company.

But security experts had said the Mydoom.B variant was spreading much less quickly than Mydoom.A, the version that attacked SCO Group.

Microsoft said that computers infected with the virus would not be able to

access Microsoft’s Web site. The Redmond, Wash.-based company has set up an alternative Web site, https://information.microsoft.com, for those users.

Last week, Microsoft said it would to pay $250,000 to anyone who helps authorities find and prosecute the author of the virus. The cash reward is the third so far under a $5 million program Microsoft announced in early November to help U.S. authorities catch authors of unusually damaging Internet infections aimed at consumers of the company’s software products.

SCO Group had previously offered a $250,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the creator of the Mydoom.A version.

MyDoom a Taste of Viruses to Come

E-mail viruses like MyDoom will be the weapon of choice for future corporate and political Web site attacks, with one worm able to threaten thousands of big sites at once, a top computer security official said on Tuesday.

Hundreds of thousands of computers have already been infected by the fast-spreading MyDoom worm, which has toppled the Web site of U.S. SCO Group and now has software leader Microsoft in its crosshairs.

This effectiveness, especially in harnessing an army of computers to bombard target sites with a flood of data, means copycats will likely be used by hackers and activists, said the top anti-virus official at Finland’s F-Secure, a firm that works with various law enforcement agencies on a number of cyber criminal investigations.

"You could use exactly the same technique, or even a little bit more advanced technique... to carry out your own agenda and take down the sites you want," F-Secure Anti-Virus Research Director Mikko Hypponen told Reuters in a telephone interview.

"This is a much larger attack network than anything we have seen before. With this kind of horsepower you could take down not just one site, you could take down thousands of sites - big sites - at the same time and keep them down for quite a while."

In the past three years, a series of increasingly sophisticated worm outbreaks have been used to get across a political message or blackmail businesses. Victims range from Caribbean gambling sites to Pakistani government ministries.

MyDoom emerged last week in the form of a spam e-mail message containing a well-disguised virus attachment. It was programmed to take control of unsuspecting computer users’ PCs, from which an attack was launched on SCO on Sunday.

When activated, the effect was like hundreds of thousands of users refreshing SCO’s home page at the same time, crippling the site.

"This showed the bad boys the virus works... if you want to do something like this, you can," Hypponen said.

He said while the virus was effective against smaller companies, an attack

on Microsoft would likely fail as the firm’s site was built for heavy use. Plus, the strain of the virus is less potent than the one used against SCO.

Hypponen also said MyDoom could also prove to be a smokescreen, leaving the door open for future use of the infected computers by the virus writer.

"It is creating a back door to a million computers in the world at the same time, which could be used to do lots of nasty things, especially sending spam," he said.

Hypponen said companies have some options when trying to guard against or mitigate the effects of an attack.

One route is to hire Web hosting firms specializing in defending against such attacks. If all else fails, companies have little option but to pull the site from the Web.

But with viruses increasingly well-hidden, Hypponen said the responsibility for protection ultimately will come down to technology firms because people have proven they cannot resist clicking on mysterious attachments.

"I’ve lost my faith in education. It never helps, people will never learn... They will click on everything," he said.

"We really have to take security to a higher level, and take the responsibility away from the users... (People) have to be automatically secured by someone else," he said.

Zipped Files Can Zap Antivirus Apps

E-mail users who were slow to update their antivirus software last week may have been surprised to receive a flood of e-mail messages containing .zip files from long lost acquaintances, business partners, and complete strangers.

The e-mail was sent by the recent Mydoom e-mail worm. The .zip attachments were evidence of what antivirus experts say is a new trend in virus writing circles: using compressed .zip files to hide viruses and elude detection by antivirus engines.

.Zip files are containers for one or more compressed files. Using programs like WinZip for Windows or Unzip for Unix, users compact files they want to store or transfer to others. The files must then be decompressed - or "unzipped" - before they can be viewed.

Long a staple of Internet and office communications, the compressed .zip file has become embroiled in an arms race between virus writers and antivirus technology companies, experts say.

"We’re definitely seeing a trend," says Alex Shipp, antivirus technology expert at MessageLabs. "It really took off in 2003. As soon as one virus was successful with technology like this, other virus writers took notice."

Virus authors learned long ago to hide their creations in e-mail file attachments, often disguising viruses as Windows screen saver (.scr) files or Windows program information (.pif) files, says Mike Hrabik, chief technology officer of Solutionary, a managed security services company in

Omaha, Nebraska.

While .zip files were occasionally used to mask virus payloads, the practice wasn’t common in virus writing circles because .zip, unlike .scr and .pif files, required separate software to be installed on the receiving system before the files could be opened and run on ubiquitous Windows machines, he says.

All that changed with the release of Microsoft’s Windows XP operating system, which includes native support for opening .zip files. That allows virus writers to count on users being able to unzip their attachment and open the virus file stored inside, Shipp says.

Gerhard Eschelbeck of security vulnerability scanning company Qualys agrees, saying that embedded support for .zips in modern systems makes them a rich target for worms like Mydoom.

In switching to.zips, virus authors were also picking up on trends in legitimate e-mail traffic to hide their own malicious creations, Shipp says.

"When corporations started blocking .exe [executable] files to prevent viruses from coming into their environment, people who wanted to send .exes back and forth started zipping them before they sent them. Virus writers noticed that and took advantage of it," he says.

Unlike .scrs and .pifs, which have no use in legitimate exchanges, .zip files are an important business tool that many individuals and organizations use to transfer large file. That makes it difficult for companies to strip them out of e-mail messages without affecting employees’ work, experts say.

"For the most part, .zips are effective ways to send files, so blocking them is not something you want to do because it will break other functionality," says Craig Schmugar, antivirus research manager at Network Associates’ McAfee antivirus unit.

The files have other advantages for virus authors, as well, says Vipul Ved Prakash, founder and chief scientist at antispam company Cloudmark of San Francisco.

For mass mailing worms like Mydoom, zipping the virus payload makes it smaller and enables the worm to mail out more copies of itself in the same length of time than it could with uncompressed .scr, .pif, or .exe files, Prakash says.

Zipping also changes the unique signature on the virus attachment, making it harder for antivirus engines to detect the malicious program, he says.

Eighty percent of the Mydoom samples that were submitted to Cloudmark from its SpamNet network of 800,000 users had .zip attachments, Prakash says.

Malicious hackers are also finding other ways to maximize increased .zip file use with viruses.

A recent security advisory from AERAsec Network Services and Security GmbH in Hohenbrunn, Germany, found that many antivirus engines are vulnerable to denial of service attacks from so-called "decompression bombs," in which gigabytes of data are zipped into very small files.

Antivirus engines that try to unzip these bombs often crash when trying to handle the huge amount of data stored in them, AERAsec researchers warn.

While decompression bombs have been around since the 1980s, many software products, including antivirus engines, still do not detect such attacks, says Harald Geiger of AERAsec.

But.zips are not a magic bullet for virus authors. Most antivirus programs can open and analyze the contents of .zip files, flagging any files in a .zip that match known viruses, says Schmugar.

In the end, there are no easy answers to the.zip file problem, experts agree.

Solutionary publishes a list of 20 recommended file extensions that should be blocked, including .pif and .scr, Hrabik says.

For others, such as Microsoft Word DOC files and Adobe PDF files, companies should block specific file names that are known to be associated with virus payloads, he says.

Best practices for companies should include scanning inside of .zip files and using extension blocking on files contained in the archives, says NAI’s Schmugar.

"Security is always a trade-off," says Cloudmark’s Prakash. "You can’t just stop receiving .exe and .zip files from people, because most of them are useful."

Companies need to balance business needs with security when setting up policies for files like .zips, he says.

Security policies that attach a trust level to certain e-mail senders outside and inside the company could be effective at blocking malicious .zip attachments. Better user education that addresses bad habits like forwarding executable attachments could also help, Prakash says.

Congress Eyes Internet Fraud Crackdown

Congress is expanding its focus on the growing business of online fraud with the introduction of new legislation that would mandate stiffer sentences for anyone who commits a crime using a Web site registered under a false name.

The "Fraudulent Online Identity Sanctions Act," sponsored by Reps. Lamar Smith (R-Texas) and Howard Berman (D-Calif.), would add as much as seven years to prison sentences handed out to anyone committing fraud through a Web site registered under a false name or contact in formation. And it would permit copyright owners to seek larger monetary damages from people who falsify their registration information to run Web sites that distribute copyrighted material without permission.

"The Government must play a greater role in punishing those who conceal their identities online, particularly when they do so in furtherance of a serious federal criminal offense or in violation of a federally protected intellectual property right," Smith said at a hearing on the topic today.

Smith and Berman drafted the bill after receiving complaints from the entertainment and software industries that much of their material is made available for free on Web sites whose owners are impossible to track down because their domain name registrations often contain made-up names like "John Doe" and phone numbers like "123-4567."

The information is stored in public "whois" databases that are run by registrars, the businesses that sell Internet addresses. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which oversees the Internet's addressing system under an agreement with the U.S. government, says registrars must require their customers to submit accurate information when they sign up for an address.

The proposal could run up against opposition from privacy advocates who say that information like home addresses and telephone numbers should not be made available if the registrant does not want it revealed.

They say that the information would make the databases a welcome hunting ground for unscrupulous marketers, identity thieves and stalkers.

"Because of the way whois is currently structured, there are a lot of reasons why users might submit false information that have nothing to do with copyright infringement," said Michael Steffen, a policy analyst at the Center for Democracy and Technology.

The CDT said that access some personal contact information should be restricted to law enforcement officers and copyright owners.

Defending the rights of domain owners to submit false or incomplete information to domain registrars, Marv Johnson, an attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, noted that the U.S. Constitution "recognizes that you have a right to anonymous communication."

The bill would not affect people who are trying to safeguard their privacy because it only makes it a crime to submit false registration data when it is done to help commit a crime, said Mark Bohannon, senior vice president for public policy at the Software & Information Industry Association, which supports the bill.

Bohannon added that ICANN should enforce its policy of terminating contracts with domain name holders whose information is found to be inaccurate, but "is either unable or unwilling" to do so. Intellectual property groups have complained for several years that ICANN has not enforced its policy.

ICANN "takes these issues very seriously" but has not decided whether to support the bill, said spokesman Kieran Baker.

Police Raid Kazaa Offices

Investigators working for the Australian Recording Industry Association raided the offices of Sharman Networks, makers of Kazaa peer-to-peer file-sharing software, Friday searching for evidence linking the company to copyright infringement, the company says.

The company was served with a "search and seize" order issued by a judge at the Federal Court of Australia. The homes of two Sharman executives were

also searched, according to Sharman.

The company’s Cremorne, Australia, headquarters was raided by Music Industry Piracy Investigations, a branch of the Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) early Friday morning, local time, says Rich Chernela, a Sharman spokesperson.

The search relates to legal proceedings in Australia and was part of a much larger operation that included searches of Australian universities as well as facilities owned by local Internet service provider Telestra, Chernela says, citing news reports.

"It sounds like they really took a shotgun approach," he says.

The raid was not related to Sharman’s ongoing legal fight against entertainment industry groups the Recording Industry Association of America and Motion Picture Association of America in the U.S., Sharman says.

The Australian Record Industry Association posted an undated statement on its Web page saying that it "supports the proceedings recently commenced by the record industry against Kazaa."

"ARIA supports the industry’s move to stop the illegal behavior of file sharing networks. The a??free ride’ simply can’t continue indefinitely at the expense of the owners and creators of the music," the organization says, in a statement attributed to Stephen Peach, chief executive officer of ARIA.

In its statement, Sharman labels the search "an extraordinary waste of time, money, and resources," and an attempt by the recording industry to disrupt the company’s business. "It is a gross misrepresentation of Sharman’s business to suggest that the company in any way facilitates or encourages copyright infringement," the company says.

The raids may be less about gathering information than sending a message to parties who contribute to the illegal music swapping problem, says Jonathan Zittrain, co-director of the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

"This move is consistent with the music industry’s generally held view that [file swapping] is a completely illegal activity and that they will use any legal means to impede it," he says.

Controversy Erupts over Apple Safari Update

Moving forward in the development of Mac-only software, Apple has released an upgraded Safari browser, version 1.2. This newest browser is available as a free download.

While the upgrade includes significant enhancements, its release has produced at least a murmur of complaint - and perhaps a good bit more - among Apple users.

The new release requires the most recent version of the Apple operating system, Mac OS X 10.3, code named "Panther." That has left some Apple faithful wondering why the new update was not made backwards compatible with OS X 10.2, known as "Jaguar," which still is used by many. Jaguar

users will be restricted to using the previous Safari release.

Apple’s decision was necessary, Jupiter Research analyst Michael Gartenberg told NewsFactor. "At a certain point, the company is only going to be able to support its newest initiatives on its newest operating systems." Other software companies often make similar decisions, he noted.

"If users want the full functionality of Windows Media 9, they have to use it on Windows XP, not Windows 2000 or Windows 98," he noted.

Clearly, this new Safari update offers some useful new tools. Most significantly, it includes what Apple refers to as "improved compatibility" with Web sites and Web applications.

Earlier versions of Safari were unable to access certain features of sites that were optimized for Microsoft’s Internet Explorer browser. Since IE has a greater than 90 percent share of the browser market - causing site developers to design specifically for it - other browser developers are at a competitive disadvantage.

"I know that folks have found greater compatibility with certain sites that were previously grumpy about Safari," Gartenberg said of the new release. "It shows that Apple is taking seriously the feedback it’s getting in terms of bug reports and using them to make a better browsing experience."

Safari 1.2 also includes support for personal certificate authentication, an important security feature. Its new keyboard-navigation capability means a Web surfer would virtually never need a mouse to navigate the Internet.

Users of 1.2 can use the "resume download" feature to continue paused downloads at a later time. And the new browser supports sites that use LiveConnect for communication between JavaScript and Java applets. This function requires users to have Java 1.4.2.

Based on statistics on the Apple site, Safari 1.2 surfs blazingly faster than competing browsers, loading an HTML page in one third the time that IE does.

The Safari browser has earned kudos from users and analysts alike since its release in early 2003. Features like a pop-up blocker and tabbed windows drove millions of Apple users to download the free browser. "Safari is an excellent product, and it’s the best browser on the Mac right now," Macworld editor in chief Jason Snell told NewsFactor.

But consternation over Apple’s decision to create Safari 1.2 only for its latest version of Panther has prompted some Apple users to post complaints on Mac-related message boards. (To upgrade to Mac’s latest OS X update requires many users to pay US$129.)

Some note that Microsoft has discontinued IE for Mac development, which will force Apple users to rely on Mac-only browsers as the current IE becomes obsolete.

But Gartenberg pointed to the many viable options that remain for Mac users. "When you look at the feature sets, it’s not that users of Jaguar or earlier operating systems are overly limited or have lost browsing functionality," he said, "but at a certain point Apple has got to push people onto the latest and greatest in order to support them properly."

U.S. Appeals Court Hears Key File-Sharing Case

In a landmark case over online piracy, a federal appeals court on Tuesday considered whether Napster-like Internet services can be shut down if their users swap unauthorized copies of movies and music.

Lawyers for the entertainment industry squared off against attorneys for file-sharing services Grokster and Morpheus before a three-judge panel of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in Pasadena to revisit a key ruling by a lower court.

That decision by a federal judge in Los Angeles rejected a bid by film studios and record labels to shut down Grokster and Morpheus, saying the file-sharing services enjoyed the same legal protection as the makers of videocassette and DVD recorders.

That ruling in turn relied on a 1984 U.S. Supreme Court decision that held that Sony Corp. was not liable for copyright infringement by selling VCRs that allowed users to tape TV shows - a legal finding that became known as the "Betamax Doctrine."

"While the odds are against them, they (music and movie makers) have a lot to gain. If they could get a win, it would be a huge win," said Evan Cox, an intellectual property attorney in the San Francisco office of Covington and Burling.

Music companies claim song swapping has caused lower sales of CDs because customers copy their free digital music files onto blank CDs, which violates U.S. copyright law.

Film studios believe if they do not stop piracy now, it will hurt them in the long run since downloading digital movies is expected to grow more common with the spread of broadband Internet connections.

Until the April 2003 ruling by U.S. District Judge Stephen Wilson, the record and movie companies had been successful in pursuing a legal course to shut down sites like Grokster and Morpheus, such as the song-swapping pioneer Napster.

After the ruling the record industry shifted tactics, filing suit against thousands of individuals for copyright infringement - a move that risked alienating music fans.

On Tuesday, lawyers for the Recording Industry Association of America, National Music Publishers' Association. and Motion Picture Association. of America, were prepared to argue to the appellate court that the initial ruling in favor of Grokster and Morpheus was flawed.

Attorneys for Grokster and Streamcast Networks Inc., which distributes the Morpheus software, will counter that Wilson correctly applied the Sony Betamax ruling.

In the Sony case, the Supreme Court said VCRs had substantial uses besides the taping of copyrighted material and that those uses outweighed the copying function in question.

"The Sony Betamax case created an exception for somebody who makes a product and releases it but isn't too much involved with the use of that

product," Cox said.

Similarly, Wilson ruled that Grokster and Morpheus simply provide the software for song and movie swapping, but do not dictate how the software is used. The software also had other substantial, non-infringing uses, Wilson said.

In their appeal, attorneys for the music and movie makers will argue that the software is the underlying reason users flock to the Grokster and Morpheus Web sites where the operators reap profits from advertising.

They will also argue that the Web sites regularly apply software filters to block out pornography, computer viruses and bogus files, and there is no reason the Web sites cannot apply similar filters to screen for copyrighted material.

What's Next for Linux

Linux is everywhere. it's in your Web server. It's in your data center. It's in your desktop, your laptop and your handheld. It may soon be in your car and home appliances. It's being used by NASA to operate the Mars rover.

There may yet be enterprise IT executives still wondering when to jump in, but chances are, Linux is already being used somewhere in their organization. They need not look any further for a proof of concept than e-commerce company Amazon.com Inc., which, as an early adopter of Linux, began deploying it in 2000. Now, Linux runs its entire infrastructure.

"Linux is pervasive," said Ross Mauri, general manager of e-business on demand at IBM in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. "Everyone was always pointing to the future. But we've stopped pointing. The future is here."

But now that Linux has arrived, where do we go from here? Executives contacted by eWEEK editors at LinuxWorld here last month were not as sure. Linux will no doubt extend deeper into markets already running Linux, but will Linux ever reach the holy grail of challenging Microsoft Corp. on the desktop? Leading Linux luminaries such as Linus Torvalds and his right-hand man, Andrew Morton, believe 2004 will be the year of the Linux desktop.

"In the early 1980s, we saw the transition to the PC, but I believe Linux has now matured to the point where it will be taking over as the next form of computing," said Sam Greenblatt, senior vice president and chief architect of Computer Associates International Inc.'s Linux Technology Group, in Islandia, N.Y. "We are into the Linux generation."

A number of new technologies underscore Greenblatt's views about Linux's rosy future, such as Looking Glass, a three-dimensional, multimodal desktop under development at Sun Microsystems Inc., in Santa Clara, Calif. The technology would help users move away from the Windows paradigm of today, Greenblatt said. "The Open Source Development Labs [Inc.] has also announced the Desktop Management Task Force, and we will all contribute to this. But Sun and Novell [Inc.], since its acquisition of open-source developer Ximian, will both be playing active roles on that task force," he said.

Consumers may not soon replace Windows with Linux on home PCs, but there's plenty of evidence that Linux is challenging Windows in many other client

environments. Greenblatt, for example, used a Linux-based Sharp Electronics Corp. Zaurus 5600 PDA to run much of his LinuxWorld keynote presentation. Meanwhile, automaker DaimlerChrysler Corp. is working on a Linux-based management and navigation system for its cars.

"DaimlerChrysler recently demonstrated an S-class Mercedes equipped with Universal Mobile Telecommunications System services in Berlin. Applications demonstrated included radio, navigation, maintenance services, Internet access [including e-mail and Web browsing], an MP3 player, and games. Computer Associates is working with DaimlerChyrlser on the management," Greenblatt said.

Dave Dargo, vice president of Oracle Corp.’s Linux Program Office, in Redwood Shores, Calif., said he believes Linux is on the verge of achieving mass-market enterprise capability. The 2.6 kernel was a great catalyst for the consolidation of many changes made after the production 2.4 kernel was released, Dargo said, so a lot of the work that was done in the 2.4 kernel around enterprise scalability, reliability and stability is now part of the 2.6 kernel.

"And all of those resources that were spent making 2.4 ready for the enterprise will be freed up once 2.6 is available, and [they will] be able to start working on the next set of things. As Red Hat [Inc.] and [Novell Inc.’s] SuSE [Linux] both release 2.6 kernels, there will still be room for them to add new features that make it more robust," Dargo said. "This is an exciting time for all of us, and there is a sense of purpose, destiny and challenge among us all."

Indeed, large enterprises continue to invest in Linux where it performs best-on the server. The Weather Channel Enterprises Inc., in Atlanta, a longtime Linux shop, recently refreshed its server technology with 110 Dell Inc. PowerEdge servers running SuSE Linux. The upgrades allowed Weather. com to improve the reliability and speed of data to its customers during severe blizzards in December. The site served more than 34 million page views in one day-most of them dynamically generated-at an average response time of 1.31 seconds.

"Whether our customers are experiencing severe weather, planning a vacation or just trying to decide when to play a round of golf, they’ve come to depend on the information we provide," said Dan Agronow, vice president of technology at Weather.com. "[The Linux servers] will help us continue to be one of the most reliable and popular sources of weather information on the Web."

Others, such as Red Hat’s Paul Cormier, in Westford, Mass., cautioned the recently released Linux 2.6 production kernel is not quite ready for the enterprise and said its implementation into shipping distributions could be a year away. But looking at the future, Cormier is bullish, saying on the server side it was "like a freight train moving."

Spam Has Not Been Canned by New US Law

A new US law aimed at curbing the flood of unwanted e-mails, or spam, has had little effect since going into effect January 1, according to a survey.

E-mail security firm Postini said spam accounted for 79 percent of all the e-mail it processed in January, compared with 80 percent in December.

That suggests minimal impact from the so-called "CAN-SPAM Act" - which stands for Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act.

The law stops short of banning unsolicited e-mail. But it enables Internet users remove their e-mail addresses from mailing lists and imposes for heavy fines and prison terms for those sending messages of a fraudulent or pornographic nature without warning recipients.

"The CAN-SPAM Act appears to have had little immediate effect on the amount of unwanted e-mail offers," said Andrew Lochart, director of marketing for Postini.

Another firm involved in anti-spam technology, Brightmail, estimated this week that 60 percent of all Internet e-mail sent in January 2004 was spam, a two percent increase from the company's measurement of 58 percent in December.

But it said the CAN-SPAM will play an important role in the fight against spam.

"It is important to understand that legislation is only one component of a holistic solution to the worldwide spam epidemic," said Enrique Salem, president and chief executive of Brightmail.

"Creating the best anti-spam technology is the key to winning the fight against spam."

A third firm, SurfControl, cited a proliferation of "new and improved" spam that use the new law as an excuse to market suspect services, including offers of "special spam removal" services.

One such service calls on users to pay 21.95 dollars to unsubscribe to pornography and spam-related mailing lists by clicking on a link.

"Unfortunately, many spammers aren't really doing anything different than they did before the CAN-SPAM Act was passed - they're just creating the illusion they are complying with the law and using it to market or commit fraud," said Susan Larson, SurfControl's vice president of Global Content.

She noted that spammers are providing a physical address and opt-out mechanisms required by the new law. However, the addresses are often questionable and the opt-out mechanisms unclear and in some cases, quite cumbersome.

"While some spam is very obvious, it's getting tougher to identify the legitimate e-mail marketers from the really bad actors who continue to send spam that appears legal," said Larson. "E-mail inboxes are still being jammed with messages that are really just scams or contain content tricks that seek to steal e-mail addresses and spam you again."

Teen Watches as eBay Bids Climb for His Book of Legal Threats from Microsoft

The teen who laughed in the face of Microsoft's $10 offer for his cheeky mikerowesoft.com domain name kept cool Thursday playing the Xbox the

company eventually coughed up in compensation.

In between games, Mike Rowe clicked onto eBay to watch the bids on a book of his legal correspondences with Microsoft climb with just hours before the auction deadline. Bidding closed Thursday night with some last-second entries pushing the prize up to just over $1,000 US. "So I’m happy with that," said Rowe, 17. "It’s not the 20 million that it was before, but it’ll do."

Rowe remembered when, after he first posted the documents, the bids began topping the million dollar mark and he hysterically wondered how he would spend it all.

"But then it went up to like, $20 million, and I knew it was a joke, they weren’t real bids, so I deleted them all and started asking for deposits to make sure I had serious bidders," the quiet kid said, not trying to hide the bitterness.

Legitimate collectors from Canada and the U.S. dutifully mailed him cheques for $500, which he promised to return if they don’t win the auction.

Rowe’s learning how to manage the storm of hype he’s in, making sure it doesn’t burn him and trying to spin it out as long as he can.

The Victoria teen’s battle with Microsoft rocketed him from the sleepy world of his Victoria high school and his parents’s house into a glaring international media spotlight.

Offers for computer consulting jobs have come flooding in, he’s partnered with a Princeton University marketing company and there’s talk of a TV movie.

But his story had a lonely start.

Rowe holed up in his room and plotted the web site of his dreams, the perfect platform to launch a sexy e-design career.

He spent his 16th year painstakingly constructing it. Then he was hit with his best idea yet, the icing for his internet cake: a hilarious domain name that was sure to get some, if unintentional, traffic.

He registered mikerowesoft.com last August, and exploded onto the computer company’s radar as someone who might try to use the domain to fleece them of a small fortune.

"They e-mailed me a letter asking me to give up my domain name because it infringed on their trademark. I e-mailed them back saying I didn’t want to give up all the hard work I put into it.

"They said they would give me all of the out-of-pocket expenses for the site, which they said was $10. I said ’No, I want $10,000.’ "

Rowe thought he had them, until an intimidating 25-page letter landed on his doorstep written in ominous legal jargon and quoting trademark law.

Angry at the thought of having to come up with another winning address for his site, he updated it telling anyone who might care to know how Microsoft was bullying him.

"I explained how much work I put into my site and that I didn’t want give

up. I got business cards printed up for it and everything.

"That’s when the media picked up on it."

The attention mushroomed swiftly, with hackers jumping to Rowe’s side and sending him thousands of dollars to mount a legal defence.

Stories ran across North America, painting the computer company as heavy handed and creating a public relations mess for them to wade through.

"Typically they use a more nuanced strategy to deal with these kinds of cases," said Charles Weinberg, a marketing expert with the University of British Columbia’s Sauder School of Business.

"You don’t often hear about them and they are settled in a much quieter way, but this one blew up on them.

"Microsoft created a lot of negative publicity for themselves, but from their point of view, they have to be very careful about how much they offer the kid because it could set a precedent."

Rowe’s site, which had averaged four hits a day, swelled with visits from an unabating stream of supporters who elevated him to hero status.

Suddenly he was the little guy taking on the ruthless Microsoft for computer users everywhere and the computer company realized they better change their tactic fast.

Microsoft’s Jim Desler put on his nicest face and conceded that while Microsoft has to take its trademark seriously, it may have in this case taken it too seriously.

"As well as ourselves," Desler graciously added in an interview last month.

The company put itself in a teenage headspace and took another run at negotiations with Rowe, now flush with an $8,000 defence fund provided by his loyal fans.

"We had a conference call in my lawyer’s office and they offered me an Xbox, five games, a certified professional Microsoft training course, and a trip to Redmond, Wash., for the annual technology fest," Rowe said.

"They were nice. They joked around and said I was a nightmare for their public relations department."

Playing his new Xbox, he’s no longer bitter about being forced to give up his domain name. He’s already moved on and is busy tweaking his new site mikeroweforums.com.

"They were never trying to bring me down. They were just protecting their trademark," said Rowe who is now almost famous at his high school where he has just begun the last semester of Grade 12.

In anticipation of the end of his five minutes of fame, he said he plans to put the money he gets from the auctioning off of his letters from Microsoft towards university.

The $8,000 in his legal defence is being returned to the fans that turned on him when he settled and the rest will be donated to charity.

Pentagon Cancels Internet Voting System

The Pentagon won't use an Internet voting system for overseas U.S. citizens this fall because of concerns about its security, an official said Thursday.

The official, who requested anonymity, said Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz made the decision to scrap the system because Pentagon officials were not certain they could "assure the legitimacy of votes that would be cast."

Computer security experts who last month reviewed the Secure Electronic Registration and Voting Experiment, or SERVE, had urged the Pentagon to scrap the system, saying it was too vulnerable. The experts said the system could be penetrated by hackers who could change votes or gather information about users.

"Internet voting presents far too many opportunities for hackers or even terrorists to interfere with fair and accurate voting, potentially in ways impossible to detect," the experts said in a statement Jan. 21. "Such tampering could alter election results, particularly in close contests."

Despite the concerns, Pentagon officials had said they still planned to use the system this fall and would test it during Tuesday's South Carolina primary. But the day before the voting the Pentagon called off the South Carolina test.

About 6 million U.S. voters live overseas, most of them members of the military or their relatives.

Bowl Sponsor AOL Seeks Refund

The controversial Super Bowl halftime show, in which Janet Jackson bared a breast to the chagrin of the NFL, CBS and show producer MTV, has touched the world's largest Internet service.

America Online has canceled plans to stream on-demand the halftime show that it reportedly paid $7.5 million to sponsor. The Time Warner-owned firm is reportedly seeking a refund for all or some of that money. Although AOL issued a statement distancing itself from what some government officials are calling a crass halftime performance, a representative declined comment on TW's desire for compensation from Viacom.

"While AOL was the sponsor of the Super Bowl halftime show, we did not produce it," the company said. "Like the NFL, we were surprised and disappointed with certain elements of the show. In deference to our membership and fans, AOL and AOL.com will not be presenting the halftime show online as originally planned."

The $7.5 million AOL paid to sponsor the halftime show included several ads for its new TopSpeed service. The sponsorship, therefore, represents a significant discount to the $2.3 million CBS reportedly charged per 30-second Super Bowl ad.

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